
Supporting Scrutiny in Local Government:

Consultancy Services Improvement Support Training & Development

The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) is the UK's only organisation dedicated to governance, overview and scrutiny. It has over fifteen years of expert knowledge and experience. Its consultancy team includes experienced practitioners, senior council officers and politicians who offer supportive and objective advice and guidance to councils, their officers and elected members.

Advisory and consultancy services include developing and improving scrutiny, supporting change and reorganisation, governance design for internal and external arrangements, scrutiny of commercial structures, scrutiny and governance reviews, local government re-organisation, combined authority scrutiny arrangements and in-depth studies on the effectiveness and contribution of scrutiny.

Alongside consultancy support CfPS also provides a range of courses which are delivered in-house as full-day, half-day or evening modules.

There are also full-day courses on specialised areas of scrutiny delivered centrally.

Information on these can be found in this brochure and on the CfPS web site.
www.cfps.org.uk

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SECTION 1: Training and Development for Officers and Members

Overview and scrutiny have an essential role in policy shaping, improving performance, checking weakness, aiding change, providing reassurance, holding the executive to account and reviewing issues of importance to local communities.

To do this effectively the scrutiny function and members need to develop a shared understanding on the role, purpose and objectives of overview and scrutiny. Scrutiny must be a whole council responsibility and not left to a few members in scheduled meetings.

It needs to be strong on prioritisation, develop strategic work programming and engage in evidence-based objective enquiry. It must have measurable impact on policy shaping, decision-making, the value and quality of council services.

CfPS provides the assistance, advice and training to support councils, officers and members to tackle this crucial role and to operate at the highest level of effectiveness.

Training and Development Objectives

- To give scrutiny members an increased understanding of the role and potential impact of scrutiny.
- To agree a shared understanding of the role of scrutiny within the council.
- To understand how scrutiny can have significant impact in supporting council performance.
- To explore how scrutiny can better add value to policy shaping and practice in the future.
- To support officers and members to gain specific skills in essential aspects of scrutiny.

Courses available

Essential Modules

- **Scrutiny Essentials**

This module is ideal for new members of scrutiny or as a refresh for experienced councillors or officers who want to gain the essential knowledge and understanding of the role and value of scrutiny to their council.

- **Chairing Skills**

Chairing a scrutiny committee is much more than leading the meeting through its agenda. It requires a set of skills, knowledge and understanding to get scrutiny working effectively. This module will help both new and experienced chair and vice-chairs to learn the essential skills to support them in their crucial tasks.

- **Financial Scrutiny**

This module aims to help members understand that financial scrutiny is as much about the aims and priorities of the council and how it delivers on its corporate plan within figures and finance. This module will provide members with a useful scrutiny process and ideas on how to avoid getting stuck on too much detail.

- **Scrutiny of Commercial Councils**

As councils look for innovative ways to reduce costs and tackle deficits, new structures of commercial ventures and outsourcing partnership models are emerging. But this can lead to an intricate governance framework that makes scrutiny more complex. This model helps councils and members to get to grips with this new and challenging area of scrutiny.

- **Effective Questioning Skills**

Good scrutiny depends on asking the right questions. But so often this can be random and unfocused. This module will help members to improve and increase their impact. They will understand how to plan and prepare, un-pack the issues and select the right questioning techniques.

- **The Council Officers' Guide to Scrutiny**

A course specifically for officers. Through a series of workshops designed to help middle and senior managers to understand the dynamics of council scrutiny and crucially how to satisfy the competing demands of cabinet and scrutiny.

- **Police and Crime Panels**

Scrutinising Police and Crime Commissioners and community safety partnerships is the core function of local authority led Police and Crime Panels. But this can be a complex world of multiple agencies and policing strategies and community priorities. This course helps members and officers to navigate through this challenging new landscape.

- **Political Skills for Officers**

An intermediate-level introduction to the political systems and structures of a typical council. This will introduce not only the formal legal structures that underpin politically-led decision-making in the authority, but some of the less tangible factors relating to political and organisational culture, behaviours, attitudes and values. An understanding of these cultural factors is vital to being able to operate successfully in a political environment as an officer.

- **Commercialisation and Commissioning Help for Officers to Support Members**

The support members need and expect is changing as councils are becoming more commercial. How can officers help members to understand – and constructively challenge – some of the big strategic risks and opportunities associated with these ventures? Ensuring transparency and accountability in council commercial ventures. How to advise members to avoid ineffective scrutiny mechanisms that attempt to micro-manage performance, instead keeping them focused on outcomes and benefits.

- **Objective Setting**

Scrutiny must set its mission objectives - what is it trying to achieve and how will it succeed. This short module is the essential tool-kit to making scrutiny focused, strategic and effective. It helps scrutiny to prioritise, avoid drift and select the best methods to for good scrutiny.

- **Scrutinising Partner Organisations**

For councils to be sustainable and effective so much depends on strong partnerships. But how these partnerships are publicly held to account and their effectiveness tested is a key challenge for scrutiny. It's a big new area and members need to understand the different elements of partnership arrangements and their role in scrutinising them. This is a short module for members and officers to enable them to build a scrutiny framework for council partnerships.

- **Health Scrutiny**

Funding for social care, pressures on the NHS, integration of health and care services and the impact of Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs) and Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) are all major issues for scrutiny. This module helps members to understand this complex and pressured environment and how they play a vital role in providing democratic challenge and accountability.

- **Scrutiny Programme Planning**

This module is designed to help members and officers to build a balanced scrutiny programme. It will help to provide objective support to 'de clutter' work programmes to focus on real priorities. It will look at ways to build capacity and efficiency to segmenting and sharing scrutiny activity, use of task and finish teams or scrutiny sub-groups. Less is more!

- **Understanding and Using Evidence and Data**

For scrutiny members learning how to build a picture from complicated data and piece together a narrative from the evidence is a crucial scrutiny skill. This short module helps members to tackle the data, research, evidence, witnesses and insight.

- **Children's Safeguarding and Scrutiny**

To support councillors and officers to explore the role and function of effective overview and scrutiny of children's safeguarding through:

- Underpinning knowledge of legislation, roles and functions
- Overview of recent reports and learning from scrutiny and inquiries
- Practical tools and approaches to support local scrutiny reviews of children's safeguarding

- **The Curious Corporate Parent**

This is usually a one-day training module that provides an overview of the role and functions of the corporate parent for elected members. It will support members to develop a 'curious' approach to corporate parenting to enable them to champion the needs of looked-after children.

Advanced Level Modules

- **Advanced Leading and Chairing Scrutiny**

This focuses on developing the leadership, influencing and managing skills that effective scrutiny chairs and vice-chairs need to make the committee or task group effective. There is an element of practical case study tasks and understanding behaviours and culture.

- **Advanced Financial Scrutiny**

Based on a 'live' case study, this involves a series of tasks and challenges that supports scrutiny to take a more strategic and systematic approach to the budget and MTFS process. It helps to explain how members can and should be involved in designing scrutiny around the budget process and its link to the council's strategic plan.

- **Advanced Scrutiny of Investments and Commercial Activities**

As councils find ways to develop new income streams and focus on even greater value on commercial contracts, the role of overview and scrutiny becomes increasingly complex. This module takes a case study approach to effective scrutiny of commercial structures and council investments.

- **Advanced Health Scrutiny**

This course helps members to understand the changing relationship between councils and the NHS, especially scrutiny of STPs and ICSs. This includes arrangements for joint scrutiny where two or more council areas are involved. It also helps help members to tackle scrutiny of proposals for substantial service reconfigurations, including scrutiny's contribution to service redesign.

SECTION 2: Consultancy and Improvement Services

Consultancy Services

Governance and Scrutiny Design

Effective scrutiny involves good design of the governance and scrutiny framework. CfPS works alongside councils to advice and create the essential governance infrastructure. This is particularly useful as councils move into new operating models involving single or multiple commercial structures and commissioning or procuring arrangements. Building in solid scrutiny foundations from an early stage may avoid dissatisfaction or weaker scrutiny arrangements over time.

Governance and Scrutiny Reviews

CfPS consultancy support provides a flexible and versatile resource for councils who seek authoritative and external input to review effectiveness, to support improvement or to help the scrutiny function to engage in change. Increasingly changes to local government structures, through unitarization, combined authorities, city regions and executive mayors, bring fresh challenges to public scrutiny and accountability. CfPS can offer significant experience and insight.

Scrutiny Health Checks

The Scrutiny Health-check is based on a proven evaluation model that works with your council to identify both structural and cultural pressures that can affect scrutiny performance.

The Scrutiny Health-check is:

- A short, focused and inclusive process.
- Results driven to ensure sustained improvement.
- External and authoritative gaining internal buy-in.
- Supported delivery. Not just analysis and diagnostics.
- A planned and structured way to improve.
- Member led and CfPS supported.

The Scrutiny Health Check is structured around your councils needs and designed to bring sustained improvement is the effectiveness of scrutiny. It is specifically designed to meet each council's needs.

Support for Scrutiny Work Planning for Scrutiny Officers

Expert Advice, Support and Resources

An effective work programme is central to effective scrutiny. But it's no simple task. Consultation, prioritisation, challenging conversations, seeking agreement and then piecing it all together. And then there's the amount of resource available to support both the design and delivery of the work streams and making sure members are prepared and engaged. Help and expertise from the UK's leading authority on Overview and Scrutiny. CfPS offers support to officers and members on work programme design and development.

Training and Development

A key skills course for officers and members to work through the tools and techniques to research, set goals and prioritise programme options, and ways to make the process member led. This intensive workshop provides a useful primer for both members and officers as they launch the planning process.

Practical Hands-on Experienced Support

- CfPS provides practical help to support the work programming process itself. A task and finish resource.
- We can facilitate, advise and do the leg-work on the programming process, working with officers and members.
- We can manage the process and method for selecting topics, helping members to balance competing objectives; convening workshops and assisting in the design of the final work programme.

Extra expertise and capacity to manage peak periods and set-up scrutiny for a productive and successful year.

- Initial planning meeting with officers / chair of committee(s) – to set out first principles, assemble longlist and discuss planning assumptions and constraints.
- Collate evidence supporting each proposed item.
- Work programming seminars with scrutiny councillors to agree criteria to prioritise, discuss and agree subjects) and schedule in scrutiny work.

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